

Jeremiah 22:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Analysis

Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. This divine command to Judah's kings encapsulates covenant justice requirements. The phrase "thus saith the LORD" (koh amar YHWH, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה) introduces prophetic oracle with absolute divine authority. "Execute judgment" (asu mishpat, עֲשׂוּ מִשְׁפָּט) means to practice justice in legal decisions, while "righteousness" (tsedaqah, צְדָקָה) refers to conformity to God's moral standards in all relationships.

The command to "deliver the spoiled" (hatsilu gazul, הַצִּילוּ גָזוּל) means rescuing those robbed or oppressed—active intervention on behalf of victims, not merely avoiding personal wrongdoing. The "stranger, fatherless, and widow" represent society's most vulnerable—those without family protection or legal advocates. Mosaic law repeatedly emphasized protecting these groups (Exodus 22:21-24, Deuteronomy 24:17-21), making care for the vulnerable a covenant requirement, not optional charity.

The prohibition against shedding "innocent blood" (dam naqi, דָּם נָקִי) refers both to unjust executions and violent oppression that results in death. Judah's kings had violated this extensively through idol worship involving child sacrifice (2 Kings

21:16, Jeremiah 19:4) and political murders. God's justice encompasses both vertical relationship (worship) and horizontal relationships (treatment of others)—genuine faith always produces social righteousness. This passage establishes that political leaders are accountable to divine moral standards, anticipating Christ's kingdom where perfect justice will reign.

Historical Context

Jeremiah delivered this oracle to the "house of the king of Judah" (Jeremiah 22:1) during the final decades before Jerusalem's destruction (approximately 609-586 BC). The context includes the reigns of multiple kings: Josiah (righteous reformer), Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim (wicked oppressor), Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Each is addressed or alluded to in Jeremiah 22, with verses 3-5 providing general covenant requirements before specific judgments on individual kings.

Jehoiakim particularly exemplified the covenant violations condemned here. He built lavish palaces using forced labor without wages (Jeremiah 22:13-17), murdered prophets including Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23), and exploited the poor while living in luxury. The socioeconomic injustice was severe: wealthy landowners accumulated property by fraud (Micah 2:1-2), courts were corrupt and favored the rich (Isaiah 1:23, 10:1-2), and political elites oppressed rather than protected the vulnerable.

Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BC vindicated Jeremiah's warnings. The Babylonian conquest resulted from covenant unfaithfulness, particularly the leadership's failure to administer justice. The exile demonstrated that God takes His justice requirements seriously—ritual worship without social righteousness is abomination (Isaiah 1:10-17, Amos 5:21-24). The prophetic emphasis on justice anticipated Jesus' denunciation of religious leaders who "devoured widows' houses" while maintaining external piety (Matthew 23:14), and His teaching that the final judgment will evaluate how people treated the vulnerable (Matthew 25:31-46).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this passage challenge the separation of personal piety from social justice in contemporary Christianity?
2. What does it mean practically to "deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor" in modern contexts?
3. How should believers hold political leaders accountable to divine standards of justice while respecting governmental authority?
4. What is the relationship between worship practices and treatment of vulnerable populations in determining genuine faith?
5. How does Christ's kingdom fulfill the justice requirements that Judah's kings failed to uphold?

Interlinear Text

וְצִדִּיק הַ מִּשְׁפָּט עֲשֵׂה וְיְהוָה אָמַר כֹּה הָאֵל
H3541 Thus saith the LORD Execute ye judgment and righteousness
H559 H3068 H6213 H4941 H6666

וְיָגֵר עֲשֵׂה וְקִי מִיָּד גָּז וְלֹא יִהְיֶה יָלֹד
and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor to the stranger
H5337 H1497 H3027 H6216 H1616

וְדָם תִּתְּחַמֵּסוּ אֶל תִּנּוּ אֶל וְאֶלְמָנָה יֵת וּמִן
the fatherless nor the widow and do no wrong and do no violence blood
H3490 H490 H408 H3238 H408 H2554 H1818

הַזֶּה: בְּמָקוֹם וְתִשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל נָקִי
innocent neither shed in this place
H5355 H408 H8210 H4725 H2088

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 21:12 (Judgment): O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Jeremiah 22:17 (Blood): But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

Micah 6:8 (Righteousness): He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

James 1:27 (Parallel theme): Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Ezekiel 22:7 (Parallel theme): In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow.

Malachi 3:5 (Judgment): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 1:23 (Judgment): Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Psalms 68:5 (Judgment): A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

Proverbs 23:10 (Parallel theme): Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless:

Jeremiah 5:28 (Judgment): They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.